

# Study Guide for “Left-Wing” Communism: An Infantile Disorder by Vladimir Lenin

First Edition

*Written by Comrade H. Donovan*

This document is in the public domain; however, I would like to emphasize that I disapprove of its usage in any generative, “AI,” for any reason.

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## Introduction

“Left-Wing” Communism: *An Infantile Disorder*, with its lesser-noted tagline, *An Attempt at a Popular Discussion on Marxist Strategy and Tactics*, despite what the name may seem to imply to those unfamiliar with Communist terminology, does not in fact imply that Communism is right-wing (albeit some Communists also use the term, “right-wing Communism,” or, “conservative Communism,” to refer to the inverse problem), but is instead about maintaining democratic centralism via maintaining the Communist Party line.

Left-wing Communism refers to being too far ahead of existing conditions and attempting to advocate for policies which cannot be met in the current conditions, and in fact require future conditions; an epitome of this is the anarchists. Left-wing Communism will oftentimes also include revisionism of Marxism, which can be seen in the Eurocentrism of Trotskyism.

Inversely, though less relevant to this book, right-wing Communism can either refer to what Marx and Engels called, “bourgeois socialism,” (an ideology best epitomized by social democrats and democratic socialists) which refers to when people seek social reforms to raise everyone to the level of bourgeoisie, but are just maintaining capitalism in the process, or, alternatively, it can refer to being too far behind the Party line, attempting to retain the status quo without moving the Party line forward despite developed conditions, thus stagnating the transition through the Lower Stage of Communism and into the Higher Stage of Communism.

“Left-Wing” Communism: *An Infantile Disorder*, by the very nature of its subject matter, will act as a heavy polemic against anarchists, Trotskyists, Luxembourgests, and similar categories of Socialists; notably, a common thread between Left Communists (sometimes abbreviated as *Leftcoms*) is the assertion of, “anti-authoritarianism,” a term which was originally used in Communist spaces to berate Karl Marx, as hurled by Mikhail Bakunin and his followers.

As new terms come up in the document that may be unfamiliar or have experienced lingual drift, they'll be clarified for their individual sections. Additionally, to encourage reading the document rather than seeking summaries, key takeaways for different sections will be presented as questions for the reader to answer, allowing them to seek the answers themselves and come to a greater understanding of the document.

This is unfortunately due to the fact that—while being somewhat viable as onboarding to reading Socialist theory, assuming someone is actively encouraged to learn and possibly assisted in doing so (as opposed to berated)—summarized Socialist theory significantly waters down the original documents and will only provide a rudimentary understanding.

The headings beyond this point in this document will simply denote the relevant sections of “*Left-Wing*” *Communism: An Infantile Disorder*.

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## **In What Sense We Can Speak of the International Significance of the Russian Revolution**

Important Context:

- Lenin is explaining here that the tangible experience of the Soviet *October Revolution* revealed to the Communists a series of fundamental, universally applicable principles for a Communist revolution, despite many of them having been previously assumed to be unique to the Russian conditions.

## **An Essential Condition of the Bolsheviks' Success**

Key Takeaways:

- What were the two primary keys to the Communist Party gaining and retaining power?
- How is the discipline of the proletariat's revolutionary party maintained? How is it tested? How is it reinforced? (Note: The answers to these questions are in the same order within the paragraph these appear.)

## **The Principle Stages in the History of Bolshevism**

Important Context:

- The experience with the Bolsheviks (meaning, “the majority,”) and the Mensheviks (respectively, “the minority”) in electoral politics was achieved not through entryism from an existing bourgeois party, but by following the instructions outlined by Karl Marx decades earlier: to elect members from proletarian parties *against* the existing bourgeois parties.

Notably, they refused to cooperate with the reactionary government, and likewise criticized both

the reactionary government, as well as the Socialism-appropriating opportunist factions which were the Mensheviks and the Socialist-Revolutionaries, and multiple high-ranking members were subsequently arrested and exiled to Siberia.

- Social imperialism: Socialist in name, imperialist in nature. Likewise with respective definitions for *social chauvinism* and *social patriotism*. *Social patriotism* is typically inverted in the modern day as *patriotic socialists* (sometimes alternatively called *national chauvinist*) to reflect the nomenclature of *national socialists*, and subsequently they're shortened to *patsocs*, much alike the shorthand of *nazi* and *nazbol*.

A modern example of patsocs is the *American Communist Party (ACP)*, a national bolshevik party that splintered from the CPUSA after failing to create a fifth column; they advocate for, "MAGA communism," USAmerican nationalism, and have direct ties with Russian nazbols.

Key Takeaways:

- Why did the Bolsheviks maintain the most democratic centralism and vanguard morale, as well as the least casualties, during and after the bourgeois revolution (against the Russian Empire) from 1905–1910?
- What was the precursor to being able to overthrow the bourgeois government?

## **The Struggle Against Which Enemies Within the Working-Class Movement Helped Bolshevism Develop, Gain Strength, and Become Steeled**

Important Context:

- On the note of participation in reactionary governments, this means that it's our job as Marxists to elect workers from our own parties into not only local, but especially congressional, positions. However, the greater democratic power that we achieve within the bourgeois government, the more pushback we will receive—which in turn will cause further revolutionary agitation as the people have a clearly visible view of suppression of democracy.

In the example of the USA in particular, we've reached a point similar to that of the Russian Empire's Duma, however, where the dictator of the USA is entirely ignoring established laws and congressional decisions, meaning the congress and the dictator function in a similarly autocratic position to the Duma as nothing more than an advisor to the emperor.

I am consequently providing the proposition that while we should still do what we can to participate in congress—as *our own workers' party separate from the existing bourgeois parties and separate from the revisionist, reformist, dogmatic, opportunist, and chauvinist movements*—(while also bearing in mind the looming threat of a potential anti-Socialist law under the current regime), we should also work to be elected into local organizations, especially trade

unions, and, if possible, local and regional positions up to and including state governors, with equal priority to the national congress and house of representatives.

Key Takeaways:

- What was the key problem the Bolsheviks fought against? (Note: This can be seen universally in all social democratic and democratic socialist movements and parties.)
- Should Communists engage in political compromises? In what kind of conditions? When should we not?

## **“Left-Wing” Communism in Germany. The Leaders, the Party, the Class, the Masses**

Important Context:

- In regards to the final sentence in this section, wherein agents provocateurs are constantly sent into Communist Parties, and that the appropriate response is a combination of legal and illegal work, do you know of any Communist Parties that actually follow this advice? How many Communist Parties have been compromised by their unwillingness to perform underground work?

Key Takeaways:

- Why is the assertion of the antagonism between dictatorship of the masses and the dictatorship of their Party leaders absurd?
- What does rejecting the concepts of Party leadership and Party discipline (I often refer to this as, “the Party line”) actually result in?
- How is Party discipline beneficial to the proletarian movement?
- How did the utilization of the all-Russia newspaper, Iskra (as was described in *What Is to Be Done? Burning Questions of Our Movement* by Vladimir Lenin), serve as a counter-active to a government agent infiltrating the Bolsheviks’ Party?

## **Should Revolutionaries Work in Reactionary Trade Unions?**

Key Takeaways:

- How can Communist Parties weed out reactionary elements in trade unions and help them achieve proletarian unity?
- What was one of the criteria of the success of the Bolshevik struggle vs. the Mensheviks in Russia? How is this synonymous with public opinion between Marxist-Leninists vs. democratic socialists or social democrats?
- Where should Communists work to gain the support of the masses?

- Why did the AFL (later merged into AFL-CIO) win out proletarian support over the IWW? (See footnote 27 in the Marxists Internet Archive copy; this is also voiced in an audio archive from a channel literally called Marxist-Leninist Theory—unfortunately the reader is neither cited nor do they name themself.)

## Should We Participate in Bourgeois Parliaments?

Key Takeaways:

- What is the best way to judge how well a Party fulfills its obligations to the proletariat?
- What is the purpose of Communists working to be elected into bourgeois parliaments? How does this factor into the masses allowing the Marxist-Leninist vanguard to dissolve bourgeois parliaments?
- Why is it important for actually revolutionary Communist parties to combine legal and illegal action?

## No Compromises?

Key Takeaways:

- How can the proletariat gain the strength to vanquish bourgeois power through compromise without becoming opportunist?
- Should Marxism be treated as a dogma? What is Lenin’s comment to Leftcoms, West European, and American revolutionaries?
- What are the examples Lenin provides of compromises with other Socialist parties? How did the Bolsheviks combat counter-revolutionary opportunism during these compromises?

## “Left-Wing” Communism in Great Britain

Key Takeaways:

- Is idealism (the, “state of mind”) enough for leading the masses in a revolutionary proletarian struggle?
- What is a key feature to Marxist-Leninists achieving victory over parliament?
- How does Lloyd George’s political suggestion align to those of modern bourgeois countries against Socialists, especially against Marxists?
- What is the required event for a revolution to succeed?
- Is gaining seats in parliament as important as having the freedom to agitate, propagandize, and participate in political activity?

- How can the utilization of national-level elections (ex. The president of the USA) be likened to a hanging? (Note: It's the responsibility of Communists to thoroughly study the policies and political history of all available political candidates.)

While we should always strive to elect people from our own Party, against the bourgeois parties, when this may not be a popular option—for instance, in the preservation of consistent political crises around presidential election periods which creates a strong public call for a Democratic presidential candidate by the liberals in the USA—we should strive to elect their candidates, both to prevent further ratcheting towards the right, and to teach the proletariat during the whole of their terms about the ways in which those candidates betray proletarian interests and continue to uphold the system against the workers, and especially platforms the more reactionary Republican party; for example, with explosive ICE funding under Obama and Biden, and a nearly equivalent boom in ICE funding to Trump having been an explicit campaign goal for Harris.

No bourgeois candidate should be spared from our criticism—they should be praised when they pass policies which are beneficial to the working class (for example, increasing wages, decreasing the work week, increasing the power of unions) and they should be condemned when they maintain or create policies which are detrimental to the working class.)

## Several Conclusions

Important Context:

- For further context of the war Lenin repeatedly alludes to, please refer to *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* by Vladimir Lenin, which is already covered in a study guide in this First Edition series.

Key Takeaways:

- What is the current practical task for Communists? How does this factor into inter-ideological struggles between Marxist-Leninists and opportunists (such as the social democrats and democratic socialists, who have gained popular support despite being both opportunists and chauvinists)?
- How are failed strikes and protests under bourgeois democracy still beneficial to the Communist movement? (Note: This is directly relevant to Hands Off/No Kings/Resist Fascism/50501/whatever they next call it—these are all effectively the same movement, as they're all platformed by the Democratic party; they keep rebranding despite having multiple websites running simultaneously—movements creating no real change.)
- What must the proletariat come to realize? (Note: What happened in Italy and Germany shortly after Lenin mentioned the only alternative to Communism? This is still relevant, especially during economic crises.)
- What are the three key class statuses for a Communist revolution to be successful?

- What is the main objective of the Communist movement in Western Europe and America today? (Note: This is still relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.)
- What are Lenin’s instructions to West European and American Communists to, “create a new, uncustomary, non-opportunist, and non-careerist parliamentarianism,” despite its extreme difficulty?
- How can redbaiting (accusing people of being Socialist, Communist, Marxist, et cetera) and agitation against Communists by bourgeois politicians still be beneficial to the Communist movement?
- What is the problem with Left doctrinairism? How should Communists combat it?

## Appendix

### Section 1: The Split Among the German Communists

Important Context:

- The start of this section isn’t openly clarified in the Marxist-Leninist Theory audiobook; it begins with the following statement:

“Before publishing houses in our country—which has been plundered by the imperialists of the whole world in revenge for the proletarian revolution, and which is still being plundered and blockaded by them regardless of all promises they made to their workers—were able to bring out my pamphlet, additional material arrived from abroad. Without claiming to present in my pamphlet anything more than the cursory notes of a publicist, I shall dwell briefly upon a few points.”

Key Takeaways:

- Is a party split more advantageous than sectarianism? What should party splits be careful to prevent impeding?

### Section 2: The Communists and the Independents in Germany

Key Takeaways:

- Why is a bourgeois democracy inseparable from the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie (here called, “dictatorship of capital”)?

### Section 3: Turati and Co. in Italy

Important Context:

- Lenin’s discussions of what would happen if the Communist movements in Germany and Italy failed to expel reactionaries and chauvinists aged like wine: only 2 years later, Italian fascism was born, led by Benito Mussolini (whom you may have noted was directly named in this book

despite not yet having risen to power), who had been inspired by the social democrats to advocate for class collaboration; shortly thereafter, noticing continued economic problems, Adolf Hitler slightly modified fascism into nazism, withdrawing more social democrat policies of social reforms to create a slightly more stable version of fascism.

We as Communists need to learn from this and prune our Parties well and often.

## **Section 4: False Conclusions from Correct Premises**

Key Takeaways:

- How do Communists erode bourgeois influence after taking political power? How is this antithetical to the counter-revolutionary tendency of anarchism?

## **Section 5 (Untitled) and Section 6: Letter from Wijnkoop**

Important Context:

- These are simply clarifications of the aforementioned material.